

Message Text

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41

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-14 ISO-00 DRC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE VALLETTA 1122

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MT, IS, LY

SUBJ: ISRAELI GUNBOATS AFFAIR RAISED IN LOCAL PRESS

REF: VALLETTA 2408 DEC 6, 1973

1. LIBYAN FINANCED WEEKLY "MEDITERRANEAN NEWS" OF JUNE 30 CARRIES FRONT PAGE AND REPETITIVE INSIDE STORY ALLEGING THAT ISRAELI PATROL CRAFT HAD BEEN REFUELED AT BRITISH MILITARY FACILITY IN MARSAXLOKK BAY DURING THEIR STOP FOR SHELTER FROM HEAVY GALES IN LEE OF MALTA LAST NOVEMBER. AS EVIDENCE, REPORT CLAIMS THAT GUNBOATS WERE LISTING AT THE TIME BECAUSE THEIR LONG-ITUDINAL FUEL TANKS HAD ONLY BEEN FILLED ON ONE SIDE AND THERE HAD BEEN INSUFFICIENT TIME TO EQUALIZE THEM. REPORT ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE VESSELS WERE HEAVY FUEL CONSUMERS AND DOUBTED THAT ISRAEL HAD CAPABILITY OF REFUELING ITS VESSELS SO FAR FROM ISRAELI PORTS.

2. STORY TOOK PAINS TO REPEAT MINTOFF'S THREAT TO BREAK RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, THE GOI INITIAL REPLY, AND THE SUB-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SEQUENT SILENCE OF BOTH PARTIES ON THE ISSUE.

3. COMMENT: WHILE OCCASIONALLY PUBLISHING ANTI-WESTERN AND PRO-LIBYAN ARTICLES, MEDITERRANEAN NEWS HAS BEEN FAIRLY BALANCED IN ITS REPORTAGE, MAINLY ON DEVELOPMENTS IN LIBYA AND ARAB COUNTRIES GENERALLY. THE FOREGOING REPORT, HOWEVER, MAY HAVE BEEN AN INTENTIONAL EFFORT TO SHOW THAT MINTOFF WAS TOO EASY ON THE ISRAELIS (AND THE BRITISH), CREATE PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND, CONCEIVABLY TO INDICATE LARG UNHAPPINESS WITH MINTOFF.GETZ

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